

the trunk of the old tree, and when he began to play the lute, the women sighed and looked into the night, delighted and anxious, and the young girls called out to the lute player, whom they could not find anywhere. None of them had ever heard such sounds from a lute before, they exclaimed loudly. Meanwhile, Han Fook smiled. He looked into the river where the reflections of the thousand lanterns were floating, and just as he could no longer distinguish between the reflections and the real lanterns, so he found in his soul no difference between this festival and the first one, when he had stood there as a young man and had first heard the words of the strange Master.

FLUTE DREAM



"Here," my father said, and he gave me a small ivory flute. "Take this, and don't forget your old father when you entertain people in distant countries with your music. It's high time you saw the world and learned something. I had this flute made for you because you don't like to do any other kind of work and just want to sing all the time. But I want you to remember to sing mostly songs that are pretty and pleasant. Otherwise, it would be a shame for the God-given gift that you have."

My dear father understood very little about music. He was a scholar. He thought I had only to blow into the pretty little flute, and everything would be fine. Since I didn't want to contradict him, I thanked him, put the flute into my pocket, and said farewell.

I knew our valley up to the large court mill. Beyond that, the world began for me, and I liked it very much. A bee that was tired of flying settled on my sleeve, and I carried it with me, so that I would later have a messenger who could carry my regards back home from my first resting place.

Woods and meadows accompanied me on my way, and the river ran briskly along. I realized that the world was not much different from my home. The trees and flowers, the ears of corn and hazelnut bushes spoke to me. I sang their songs along with them, and they understood me, just as they did at home.

All at once a young girl came out of the woods. She carried a basket on her arm and was wearing a broad, shady straw hat on her blond head.

"Good day," I said to her. "Where are you going?"

"I must bring the harvesters their food," she said, and walked alongside me. "And where are you going today?"

"I'm going to see the world. My father sent me away. He thinks I should play the flute for people. But I can't really do it yet. I've got to learn first."

"Well, well. But what can you actually do? You must be able to do something."

"Nothing special. I can sing songs."

"What kind of songs?"

"All kinds of songs, you know. I can sing songs for morning and evening and for all the trees and animals and flowers. For example, right now I could sing a pretty song about a young girl who comes out of the woods and brings food to the harvesters."

"Can you really do that? Well, then sing it for me."

"All right, but first tell me your name."

"Brigitte."

Then I sang the song about pretty Brigitte with the straw hat, and what she had in her basket, and how the flowers looked after her, and how the blue bind-weed from the garden fence reached for her, and I put everything that fit the scene into my song. She paid close attention and said my song was good. And when I told her that I was hungry, she opened the lid of the basket and took out a piece of bread for me. As I took a bite and kept walking at a fast pace, she said, "You shouldn't eat while walking. You should only do one thing at a time." And so we sat down in the grass, and I ate my bread, and she wrapped her tan hands around her knees and looked at me.

"Do you want to sing something for me again?" she asked when I was finished eating.

"Certainly. What should I sing?"

"Sing about a girl whose sweetheart has run away, and she is sad."

"No, I can't do that. I don't know what that's like, and I don't like sad things. My father said I should sing only nice and pleasant songs all the time. So I'll sing you something about the cuckoo or the butterfly."

"And you know nothing at all about love?"

"About love? Oh yes, it's the most beautiful thing there is."

Immediately I began singing about the sunbeam that loved the red poppy flowers and how he played with them and was full of joy. And about the little female finch who waited for the male finch, and when he came, she flew away and pretended to be scared. And I continued to sing about the girl with the brown eyes, and about the young man who came and sang and sang and received a piece of bread

for his singing. But now he didn't want bread anymore. He wanted a kiss from the maiden and wanted to peer into her brown eyes, and he continued to sing for a long time and didn't stop singing until she smiled and closed his mouth with her lips.

Then Brigitte leaned over and closed my mouth with her lips and closed her eyes and opened them again, and I looked at the golden-brown stars and saw myself and several meadow flowers reflected in them.

"The world is very beautiful," I said. "My father was right. Now I'll help you carry the food to your people."

I took her basket, and we continued to walk. Her step sounded in stride with mine, and her good humor matched mine as well. The forest talked to us softly and coolly from the mountaintop. I had never wandered with so much delight, and I sang cheerfully for quite some time until I almost burst with exhilaration. There were just too many things rushing together from valley and mountain, from grass, leaves, river, and bushes, and they all told stories.

Right then I had to think: If I could understand and sing all these thousands of songs of the world at the same time, about the grass and flowers and people and clouds and everything, about the jungles and pine forests and also about the animals, and in addition all the songs about the distant seas and mountains and stars and moons, and when all that could resound and sing at the same time within me, then I would be the dear Lord Himself, and every new song would have to glow like a star in heaven.

But just as I was thinking all this, I grew very quiet and felt strange because none of this had ever occurred to me before. Meanwhile, Brigitte stood still and held my hand tightly on the handle of the basket.

"Now I must go over that hill," she said. "Our people are over there in the field. And you? Where are you going? Do you want to come with me?"

"No, I can't come with you. I must see the world. Thanks very much for the bread, Brigitte, and for the kiss. I'll think of you often."

She took the basket of food, and her eyes tilted toward me over the basket in the brown shadow, and her lips hung on mine, and her kiss was so good and tender that I almost became sad because I felt so good. But I quickly said farewell and marched down the road.

The girl climbed the hill slowly, and she stood under the leaves hanging from a birch tree on the edge of the woods and looked after me. As I waved to her and tilted my hat on top of my head, she nodded to me one more time and disappeared silently like a picture into the shadows of the birch trees.

So I calmly went my way and was steeped in thought until the road led me around a corner, where a mill stood, and next to the mill was a boat on water, and a man was sitting in the boat, and he seemed to be waiting for me, for when I took off my hat and climbed into the boat, it began to sail at once and headed down the river. I sat in the middle of the boat, and the man sat behind at the helm, and when I asked him where we were going, he looked up and regarded me with veiled gray eyes.

"Wherever you would like," he said with a subdued voice. "Down the river and into the sea, or to the large cities. You have the choice. It all belongs to me."

"It all belongs to you? Then you're the king."

"Perhaps," he said. "And you're a poet, it seems to me. So sing me a song about sailing."

I collected myself. I was somewhat afraid of the solemn man,

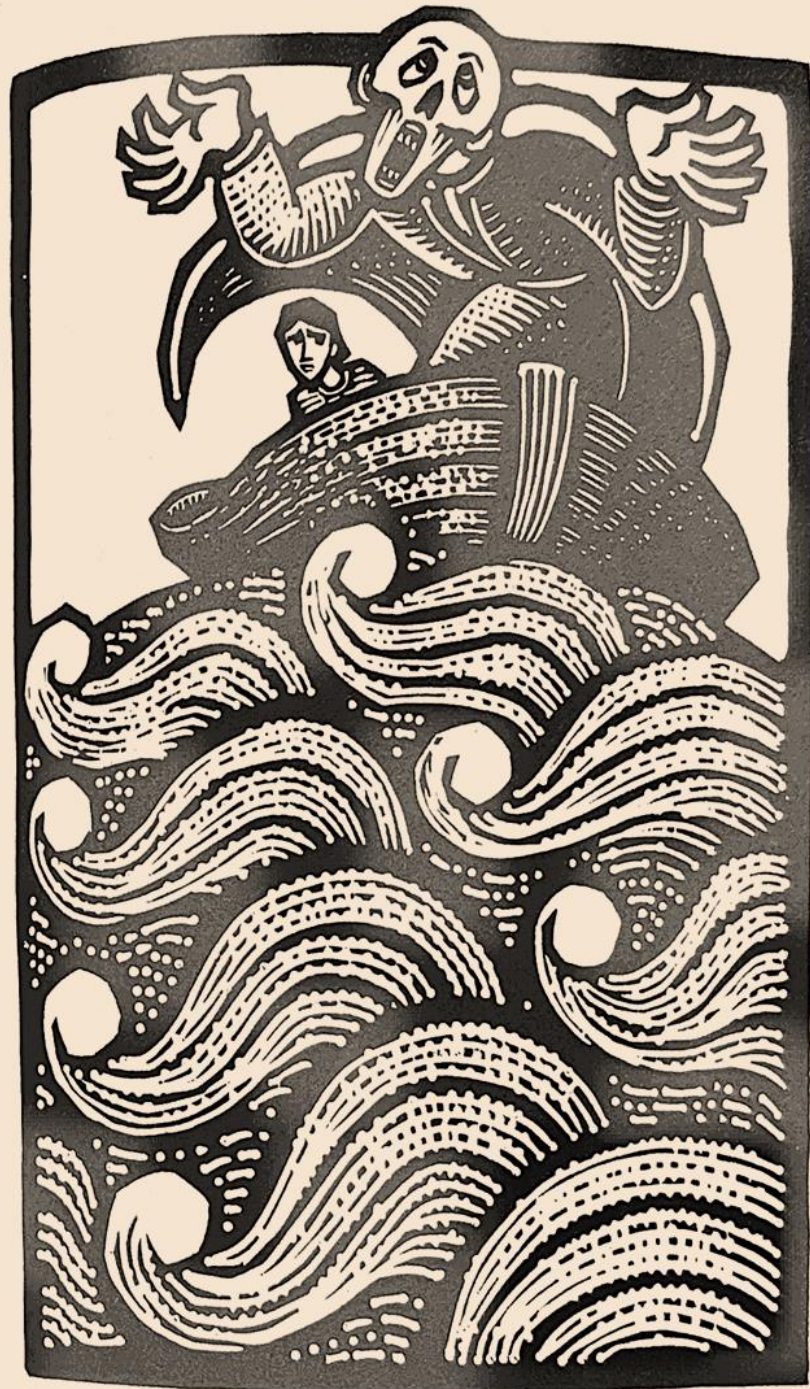
and our boat sped silently down the river. I sang about the river that carried the ships and reflected the sun and rushed against the rocky banks with force, and then joyfully completed its journey.

The man's face did not change, and when I stopped, he nodded like a dreamer. And suddenly, to my astonishment, he himself began to sing, and he too sang about the river and the river's journey through the valleys, but his song was more beautiful and more powerful than mine, and it all sounded very different. The way he sang, the river rushed from the mountains as a staggering destroyer, sinister and wild. The gnashing current felt itself harnessed by the mills and covered by bridges. It hated each boat that it had to carry, and it smiled as it cradled and rocked the white corpses of drowned people in its waves and long green water plants.

None of this pleased me, and yet the sound was so beautiful and mysterious that I became completely confused and said nothing out of fear. If everything that this old, fine, and smart singer sang with his subdued voice was true, then all my songs were only foolishness and mere boyish games. The world was not basically good and bright like God's heart, but rather was dark and ailing, evil and sinister, and when the woods murmured, it was not out of pleasure but due to torture.

We continued sailing, and the shadows grew long, and each time I began to sing, it sounded less bright, and my voice became softer, and each time the strange singer responded with a song that made the world even more enigmatic and painful, and I became more disconcerted and sad.

My soul hurt, and I regretted that I had not remained on land with the flowers and the beautiful Brigitte. To console myself in the



growing dusk, I sang again about Brigitte and her kisses, in a loud voice through the nocturnal glimmer.

As it grew darker, I became silent, and the man at the helm began singing. He, too, sang about love and the pleasure of love, about brown eyes and blue eyes, about red moist lips. It was beautiful and gripping how he sang, full of grief and sorrow about the river growing dark. But in his song love had also become dark, anxious, and a deadly mystery that caused people to grope around and become confused, until in their hurt, need, and yearning, they tormented and killed one another.

I listened and became tired and despondent, as if I had been traveling for years and had waded through nothing but distress and misery. I felt the stranger constantly infecting me with a gentle, cool stream of sadness and spiritual anxiety that crept into my heart.

"So life is actually not the most sublime and beautiful thing in the world," I finally cried with bitterness. "It's death. Well, then I beg you, sad king, sing me a song about death."

The man at the helm sang about death, and he sang more beautifully than I had ever heard anyone sing. Nevertheless, not even death was the most beautiful and sublime thing in the world, nor did he consider it consolation. Death was life, and life was death, and they were entwined in an eternal furious struggle of love, and this was the ultimate word and the meaning of the world. From there came a glimmer that exalted all misery, and from there came a shadow that cast a gloom on all pleasure and beauty and covered it with darkness. But pleasure burned out of the darkness more intensely and more beautifully, and love glowed more deeply during this night.

I listened and became very quiet. I had no will other than that

of the strange man. His glance settled on me. It was silent and possessed a certain sad kindness, and his gray eyes were full of the hurt and beauty in the world. He smiled at me, and then I took courage and implored, "Can't we turn around? I'm scared here in the night. I want to turn around and go where I can find Brigitte or return home to my father."

The man stood up and pointed into the night, and his lantern shone bright on his lean firm face.

"There is no way back," he said in a sincere and friendly way. "You must always move forward if you want to fathom the world. You've already had the best and most beautiful from the girl with brown eyes, and the farther you are from her, the more beautiful and better it will become. So continue to travel where you like. I'm going to give you my place at the helm."

I was deeply despondent, and yet I realized that he was right. Full of nostalgia, I thought about Brigitte, home, and everything that had been close and dear to me and everything that I had lost. But now I wanted to take the stranger's place and be at the helm. This is the way it had to be. Consequently, I stood up in silence and went to the helm, and the man came toward me in silence. When we were right next to each other, he looked straight into my eyes and gave me his lantern.

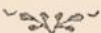
Then when I took my place at the helm with the lantern by my side, I realized with fright that the man had disappeared. But I was not horrified. I had sensed it. It seemed as if my beautiful day of wandering and Brigitte and my father and home had only been a dream, and that I was old and sad and had been sailing forever on this nocturnal river.

I realized that I was not allowed to call the man, and as soon as

I understood this, I felt chilled to the bone and wanted to know if what I had already sensed was true. So I leaned over the water and lifted the lantern and saw a sharp and serious face with gray eyes reflected in the dark water—an old, knowing face—and it was me.

And since there was no way back, I continued my voyage through the night.

A
DREAM
ABOUT THE
GODS



I walked alone and helplessly and saw that everything around me was becoming dark and shapeless. So I began searching and running to find what had happened to all the light. All at once I saw a new building with glistening windows and a light as bright as day shining above the doors, and I went through a gate and entered a brightly lit hall. Many people had gathered there and sat quietly, full of attention, for they had come to be consoled and enlightened by the priests of science.

In front of the people on a raised platform stood a priest of science, a somber man dressed in black with intelligent, tired eyes, and he spoke with a clear, mild, and convincing voice to the numerous people in the audience. There were bright charts in front of him with many pictures of gods. He stepped up to the god of war